

# Scottish Socialist VOICE



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# BUILD AGAINST THE WESTMINSTER AND HOLYROOD CUTS!

# CAN LABOUR ESCAPE LONDON'S SHADOW?

by John McAllion

**LIKE** “Love and Marriage” or a “horse and carriage”, the Labour Party and Westminster have always gone together.

The original TUC resolution that led to the creation of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900 called only for the election of “labour members in the next parliament”. Keir Hardie’s motion at the first meeting of the LRC that year was to establish a “distinct Labour group in Parliament who shall have their own Whips”.

There was in fact no other purpose to the establishment of the Labour Party in 1900 than to secure independent representation of labour in parliament.

Any other possible purpose was specifically excluded at that first meeting, including a motion from the Social Democratic Federation calling for an “organisation separate from the capitalist parties” and “based upon recognition of the class war”.

As a result, from its inception the party was decisively parliamentary in character. The role of British Labour was to win elections and to form British Governments. The Party existed to give parliamentary protection to its sponsors in the trade unions.

Its sole focus was the Westminster Parliament where the power of the British state resided.

In exchange for that political protection, the British trade union movement gave the Parliamentary Labour Party its financial, electoral and organisational support along with the unquestioning support and electoral loyalty of its members.

This “Great Alliance” of Party and trade union movement became the defining



characteristic of the British Left for the next hundred years.

For most of those years British Labour was hardly troubled by Scottish nationalism. North of an increasingly irrelevant border, the Party contentedly reigned as the British Labour Party in Scotland. The idea that there might be a case for a Scottish Labour Party that owed allegiance to Scotland first was for most of the last century inconceivable to most Labour activists and supporters in Scotland.

From the 1970’s onwards, successive economic crises, the discovery of North Sea oil and the associated rise of the SNP combined to burst Labour’s British bubble and to make the Party think again about its relationship with Scottish nationalism.

When the SNP surge saw the nationalist party take nearly a third of Scottish votes cast in the October 1974 general election, the British Labour Party in Scotland was forced for the first time to take the question of Scottish Home Rule seriously.

So began the long struggle for devolution that would lead the party from the low of the failed referendum in 1979 to the highs of the successful two question referendum in 1997 and the establishment of the

Scottish Parliament in 1999. One major aspect of Labour’s involvement in that generation long struggle stands out.

The Labour Party in Scotland was never fully committed to the idea of devolution itself. Too many in the party saw devolution not as an end but as a means to an end. They supported devolution only because they saw in it the means by which they would see off the nationalist threat in their own political backyards.

Lord Robertson’s infamous remark that devolution would kill nationalism stone dead probably summed up the approach of many in the Party who remained at heart committed to the British state alone.

This British tendency begrudgingly gave ground on devolution but only when they felt the heat of the SNP’s electoral challenge.

Wherever possible they resisted, combining to kill off Calton Hill as a possible site for the Scottish Parliament on the grounds that it represented “a nationalist shibboleth”.

Fearing for Westminster’s beloved First Past the Post elections, they opposed proportional representation for Scottish elections. They insisted on the second referendum question in a vain attempt to scupper the new Parliament’s

tax raising powers.

They were also behind the vetting of candidates designed to weed out the likes of Dennis Canavan who, capable of independent thought, might take the side of Holyrood against Westminster.

They formed the backbone of career MPs at Westminster who never disguised their contempt for Scotland’s wee Parliament. They welcomed into Westminster’s ranks the Party’s rising young stars who

shunned Holyrood, along with those politically ambitious MSP’s who at the first available opportunity fled the Scottish parliament for Westminster.

Throughout the lifetime of the Scottish Parliament they have lectured Scots on what Scotland can’t do politically, rubbishing the idea of Scottish autonomy and sneering at the idea that Scotland might aspire to be like any other independent country in the world.

Having failed to connect with Scottish voters and having led Labour to a disastrous election result, they are now in charge of a review designed to restore the Party’s fortunes in Scotland.

They also were largely committed to the “New Labour” project that saw Blair and Brown drive the Party in Scotland to the right at the same time as Alex Salmond’s leadership of the SNP was shifting his party to the left and ridding the nationalists of their old “Tartan Tories” tag.

Out of touch on the national question, they remain fundamentally at odds with Scotland’s social democratic traditions.

Can they now remake Labour as an autonomous and left of centre Scottish party rooted in Scottish rather than in London politics? On the basis of who they are and where they are coming from the answer to that question can only be no.

# THE PRIVILEGE BEHIND THE POMP

by Ken Ferguson

**IT'S** a world in which the white staff carrying Lord Chamberlain (he will break it over the royal grave when HMQ dies) has the key job of deciding when flags are flown and trumpets blown.

The Chamberlain is also in charge of the Royal household and is assisted by Lords-in-Waiting, and Gentlemen Ushers and who circulate among the guests at garden parties and the Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps, who fetches incoming ambassadors for Her Majesty.

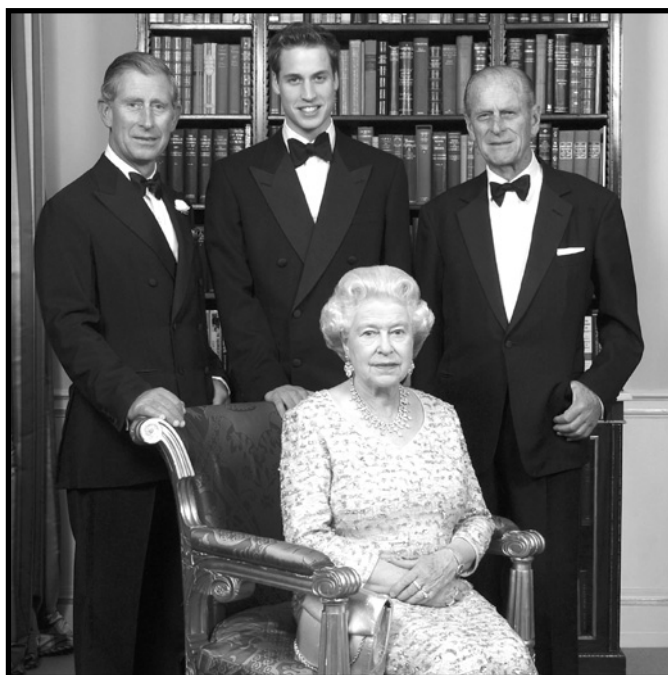
Also on hand are the Royal Bargemaster, who accompanies the Queen (on land) to functions associated with the River Thames; and the Keeper of the Queen's Swans.

Other members of this Gilbert and Sullivan cast include Gold and Silver Stick in waiting, the Keeper of the Privy Purse (yes he has an actual tapestry purse) but the cash is held by elite city bankers Coutts and Co.

Along with the Mistress of the Robes, Ladies of the Bed Chamber, Equerries and aides-de-camp they provide the front for this picturesque show which is usually presented as old fashioned but harmless.

However, as is always the case when looking at the workings of the most experienced and devious ruling class on the planet, it is wise to probe behind the pomp and circumstance to see what lies beneath.

The royals hold various wealth generating lands and titles and elsewhere in this Voice we take a look at one such body, currently in the spotlight, the Crown Estate



Commissioners but its enough to say here that that Privy Purse isn't empty.

Then if we turn to the quaintly named duo Gold and Silver stick in waiting we discover that they are senior officers in Household Cavalry - that's the ones cantering behind the coach on state events.

However its also the ones who, with a quick change of uniform, are dressed for tank driving in locations as diverse as Heathrow airport and Afghanistan.

Indeed the entire much praised British military machine is collectively "Her Majesty's Forces" and along with judges in the Ryan Giggs case, newly minted SNP MSPs and a host of others owes allegiance to the queen.

Anyone thinking that this is all irrelevant only needs to consider two recent events in which the crown played a key role - the Irish visit and the reception for US power in the shape of Obama.

During the entire Irish visit

viewers were treated to wall to wall breathless coverage form fawning "royal" correspondents on how the short trip rewrote history.

A wave of the royal hand, a few words in gaelic and a wreath laying set aside various slaughters from Drogheda to Bloody Sunday as things that shouldn't have happened.

Alongside the well crafted images the incessant PR drum beat told us that the Irish were now forgiving and forgetting 800 years of history and all because of the monarch's winning ways.

It took a veteran English journalist Richard Ingrams to puncture this guff when he pointed out that it was difficult to judge Irish opinion since mostly the public were held several streets away behind a massive security cordon.

Nor was much mention made of the fact when the "historic" visit took place to the GAA's Croke Park 8 out of 9 Ulster GAA county associations were absent

whether uninvited of boycotting is unclear or that demonstrators were arrested for waving the tricolour in protest.

Likewise with the Obama visit the full royal monty was deployed to grease the wheels of commerce and war, the real business of the day.

Again the "British" Broadcasting Corporation staff ladled out the PR syrup assuring us that Obama was one of the few men on the planet who had hugged the queen and that the US top two were really close friends with the Windsors.

Again behind the bread and circuses pap the real agenda was being played out with the US ensuring that the Brits remain what they are - junior partners in war and towing the capitalist line economically.

It is this hard power that lies behind more soft soap about the "special" relationship which is in reality more like that of lamp post and the dog than the newly crafted sound bite of an "essential relationship".

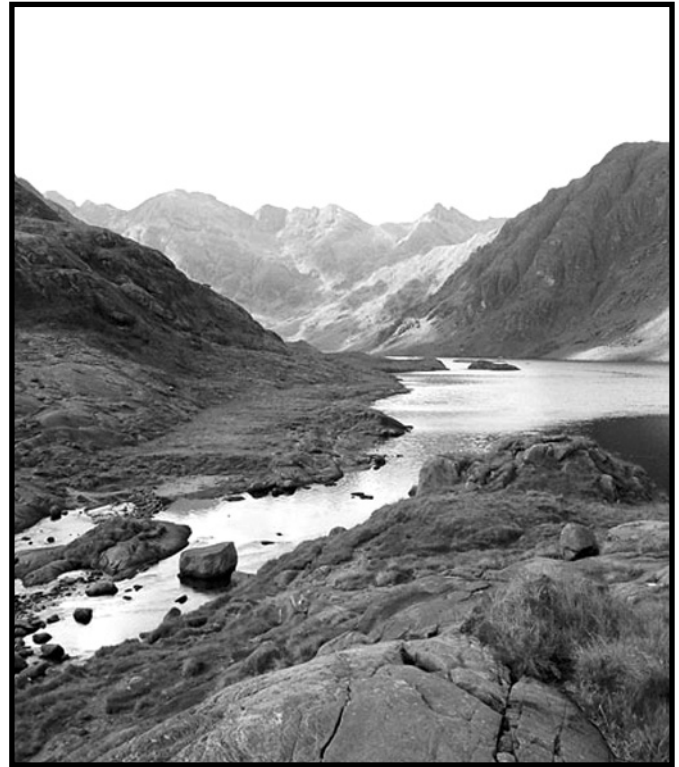
Meanwhile this "essential" relationship will step up co-operation in spying, war and making the world safe for the real monarchs of the universe in Wall Street and the City of London.

Far from a benevolent force for good the British monarchy sits at the centre of a web of deceit, war and plunder which made the world what it is today and intends to keep it that way.

The sooner an independent Scotland breaks with the British state and monarchy the sooner we can move to building justice and peace instead of plunder and war.

# TIME TO TAKE SCOTLAND BACK

One of the key post landslide demands tabled by First Minister Salmond is control of the revenues of the Crown Estate Commissioners but it a safe bet that most Scots will only have a hazy idea of who they are and why clipping their wings matter. **Roz Paterson** takes a look



**THE** next time a pro-union scaremonger tells you that Scotland would be bankrupt without the whacking big Westminster ‘subsidy’, ask s/he to take a look at the work of the Crown Estate Commissioners (CEC), and *then* come back and say Scotland’s getting a free ride.

While you’re at it, ask them why on earth the Conservative and Unionist party would be so concerned to maintain the status quo if it means shovelling cash to Scottish savages who don’t even have the good grace to vote Tory?

But back to the CEC, who run the Crown Estate. Never heard of them?

Nonetheless, every year, we give them a shedload of money because...er...hmm.

Since 1832, a law has decreed that certain property in Scotland, including half the coastline and all of the sea-bed to a distance of 12 nautical miles, should be managed by the Crown Estate, even though this latter neither owns nor maintains this property.

Since the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher informed us that everything was for sale, the CEC started charging rent.

Furthermore, the CEC gets the last word on who uses

this land, and for what.

In other words, if you want to set up a wave farm, you have to get the CEC’s agreement and they get the rental, which is whatever they say it is.

They have sold fishing rights from under the noses of local communities and dragged their feet on decisions pertaining to sustainable energy. In fact, they have behaved like a disdainful, absentee landlord, the kind that should rightfully be shot by his own grouse beaters.

As it says in the Crown Estate Act of 1961, none dealing with the Crown Estate will be “concerned to inquire as to the extent of their authority, or the observance of any restrictions on the exercise of their power.”

That’s you told, that is.

So who the hell are these CEC people, and what did we ever do to them?

They reside in London’s Regent Street, and Hoover up rents, not just from North Britain, but wealthy estates in the English capital, such as Belgravia.

The Crown Estate portfolio is worth some £6billion, and it received revenue of £9.1million from Scotland alone in the year 2009/10.

Despite its name, it is not a front organisation for Elizabeth Windsor and her silly big boy Charles. In fact, the money goes straight to the Treasury, yet mysteriously fails to feature in the Scottish block grant.

If this has got you jigging angrily on your feet and ranting lines from the *Ballad of the Men of Knoydart*, then you’re not alone.

Prominent amongst those crying out for an end to this terrible anachronism are Andy Wightman, land reform campaigner and author of *The Poor Had No Lawyers – Who Owns Scotland* (and how they got it), Brian Wilson, the former Labour energy minister, and Alex Salmond.

It should, and could, be done away with quite easily.

Even a Treasury select committee concluded this was an area that should be controlled by Scotland and “as a result of the Scotland Act (1998), the Scottish

Parliament can legislate over the extent and nature of Crown property rights in Scotland.”

If it isn’t, we could find ourselves bereft of the revenue brought in by renewable energy forms such as wind and wave power, a major player in Scotland’s energy economy to come.

Not only that, but reform in the area of land ownership is desperately needed in Scotland, where absentee landlords and rich conglomerates have pissed over our rural culture for centuries, destroying agriculture, decimating communities and alienating the people from the land that holds them.

David Cameron claims he’ll fight with every fibre to save the union, but if we snuff out the revenue stream so lavishly tapped by the Crown Estate for decades, we may start to see the fight go right out of him.

# VoiceMail

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## Which way forward for feminism?

I am grateful to Mhairi McAlpine for writing in support of Slutwalk in the last issue of the Voice. I'm also grateful and inspired into action by the young SSP women who have been involved in organising the Glasgow Slutwalk on 4 June.

However, after much thought, being blown hither and thither by the arguments, I will not be attending this

event. Why? Because the word and idea we need to shout about is 'feminism'.

The last week or so has seen much public debate about women's issues and this is welcome, even though it has been a response to the enduring oppression and inequality that women still face.

Women who have made sexual assault allegations against the

former IMF boss have been pilloried in the French media, similar to the treatment of the Swedish women who recently made sexual assault allegations against left darling Julian Assange.

A nurse has been jailed for murder and attempted murder of his wives.

Women in the Congo are routinely raped. The gender politics of super-injunctions is that women's reputations can be trashed, but rich men can attempt to buy privacy and predators can silence victims.

Poverty is gendered and IMF policies impoverish women.

The cuts disproportionately affect women. Tory benefit changes, including the 'universal credit' will be disastrous for women. We live in a world where men can do anything they like to us and call us anything they like.

I know the

organisers of Slutwalk agree that feminism is the idea that protects us from all of this.

I don't like the word 'nigger' but I'm not black so I can't say if black people using it is ever helpful. Similar with the word 'queer'. But I have been a young woman and I have been called a slut.

Some of us older women were thinking of making a banner against the most hurtful things men have ever said about us. It would be something like "specky, ugly, nagging, auld hoor cunt bitch walk".

For you see, 'slut' is only the start. And feminism is the response to that.

Us older feminists have let down the young feminists in Scotland. We were vilified as radical feminist harridans who brought down Sheridan out of jealousy. Like every other woman, we learned that feminism was the word that

would get you slaughtered, so we stepped back to recover emotionally and regroup.

I applaud the courage of young women who have organised the Slutwalk action against the idea that some women ask for rape. I understand that it engages with young women. I am delighted that they have seized this opening in the hegemony. But I cannot be there because I passionately believe we must reclaim the word and idea that we dare not speak - feminism.

On Sunday 19 June, from 12-4pm, there is a Feminist Big Blether at the Hetherington building in Glasgow, which has been occupied by young people. It is a women only event to discuss the way forward for feminists in Scotland. Please come along.

Carol Hainey,  
Glasgow

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STOP THE CUTS!

# STAND UP AGAINST THE CUTS!

by *Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

**THE** annual conference of the UK's fifth-biggest trade union, the Public & Commercial Services union (PCS), marked a decisive turning point in the resistance movement to public sector cuts.

The delegates there, representing 300,000 members, with branch mandates behind them, voted almost unanimously to ballot for strike action and action short of strikes, on the issues of jobs, pay and pensions.

They explicitly named 30th June for a one-day strike, and are seeking simultaneous strike action by other public sector trade unionists. Teaching unions – UCU, NUT and ATL – seem firmly committed to this day of united action. Other unions – UNITE and UNISON – have signed agreements with the PCS to combine and collaborate in anti-cuts action. Their leaderships should now move without delay to ballot members in affected areas for strike action to coincide with the plans for 30 June.

## Build 30th June strike

And every other union in the public sector should be pressed from its branches, union reps and membership to follow suit. Even a partial general strike of public sector workers – numbering over 600,000 in Scotland alone – would be an industrial and political hurricane that could begin to blow the axe-wielding governments off course, at Westminster, Holyrood and local council levels.



There is no shortage of reasons for united action. Most people have yet to feel the full force of the storm of cuts descending on our workplaces and communities – apart from some of society's most vulnerable,

the sick and disabled, and big swathes of council workers.

Cameron and Clegg's cuts orgy of £81 billion includes £9 billion being chopped off benefits for the sick and disabled. Over 5,000 of those

hammered by these cruel cuts braved all obstacles to demonstrate in London last week. Protests in Scotland are being mounted against the vulture capitalists of Atos, the company hired to hand out callous,

unprofessional, cost-cutting medical judgements that throw people off slightly higher rates of benefit.

## Hurricane hits Scotland

But the looming assault on jobs – with economists predicting up to 100,000 job losses in Scotland – local services, pay and pensions are a cocktail about to explode and cause terrible social and human wreckage. The generalised nature of the attacks require a generalised response – a potent combination of direct action protests, united strike action, and hard-hitting arguments that explode the lie that cuts are either necessary or unavoidable.

Everyone would welcome the pre-election pledge of ‘no compulsory redundancies’ in the public sector from the Scottish government. But nobody should have to pay the price demanded for this promise – years of pay cuts and effectively a no-strike deal.

And one of the unions whose leadership was most craven in bowing down to a pay-cutting, conditions-hacking deal with COSLA – the EIS – has been given a rude lesson in the simple fact that weakness invites aggression. COSLA now wants to increase teaching hours; lengthen the working week; wipe out time protected for vital lesson preparation and marking; slash holidays and make them training days instead; and bring in fixed-term contracts for promoted teachers. All this on top of a two-year pay freeze at least a 10 per cent cut in reality).

## Nobody is safe

Whether it is teachers facing this warfare from their employers, lecturers and students facing wholesale

course closures and job losses, disabled people confronted by closure of their centres, or civil servants hit by closure of local offices in areas officially declared to be the unemployment blackspots of Scotland, nobody is safe. And that’s even before the £3.3billion cuts demanded of the Scottish government over the next two years.

The outcome of the Scottish elections was an attempt by besieged communities to find shelter from the storm of cuts issuing from Downing St. Mostly they entrusted the SNP to stand up for Scotland. The SNP made a good job of luring people into thinking they would do precisely that, and hid from view their spineless failure to stand up in defiance of the Westminster butchers’ £1.3billion cut to the Scottish budget last October.

And they cunningly disguised their plans to carry through cuts, not by defying and refusing to implement them, but by delaying them beyond the recent elections, stockpiling them, creating the conditions for a ‘double whammy’ of cuts over the next 2-3 years.

## Demand SNP resist cuts

Now the SNP are in power, with hopes and expectations of protection raised. So anti-cuts campaigners – and in particular the STUC and various mass-membership trade unions – should demand the new government fulfils the hopes invested in them, use their popular mandate, declare unequivocally that they will refuse to pass on Westminster’s butchery, and mount a mass campaign of the Scottish people demanding the powers and the money to defend every

single job, service, community facility, pay packet and pension.

Alex Salmond quite rightly immediately demanded of the London government an extension of powers for the Scottish government – including control over excise duties and Corporation Tax. But instead of demanding the latter to slash tax on big business to Southern Irish levels of 12 per cent – as Salmond clearly wishes to do – the unions should demand this extension of powers for Holyrood, not to reduce but to increase Corporation Tax to its pre-Thatcher level of 52 per cent – a policy that the PCS union shares with the Scottish Socialist Party.

## Tax big business and the rich

That would enormously expand the funds available to the Scottish government, in order to build the best public services and welfare system in Europe, with a vast expansion of jobs, mopping up the criminal waste of a young generation left jobless, turning talent to the use of society as a whole.

One of the best possible ways of holding the newly elected Scottish government to account, of demanding they give material reasons for the “hope” and “vision” which they astutely preached to win the election, is to build a mass strike and rallies on 30 June. Public sector workers, students, communities, disabled people, pensioners ... an army of resistance to the cuts on that day showing their angry determination, would not only rattle the severely weakened and divided ConDem Coalition, but also put the SNP government on the spot – not to mention an array of council leaderships who are busy slaughtering jobs, conditions and services.

## Victories through action

In campaigning for 30 June to become a mass show of unity in action, we should be encouraged by several recent victories against cuts. Cameron, Osborne and others have been spewing out bellicose, bloodcurdling class warfare against workers and their unions, with for instance Osborne advising the Institute of Directors to “get stuck in” with even worse attacks on workplace health and safety regulations and more vicious anti-union laws than even Thatcher dared to wield. But alongside that, the ConDem government is executing more U-turns than the average professional ice-skater.

A mass petition frightened them into dropping plans to privatise the woodlands – but now they want to slash one in four Forestry Commission workers’ jobs.

As the interview with Willie Telfer of PCS [see below/box] reveals, their plans to crucify the coastguard service have been thrown into rapid meltdown by a powerful community and trade union campaign. And bosses in the Driving Services Agency have capitulated in the face of threatened strike action by PCS members against a brutal array of cuts they’d planned. Action works!

## BA battles

Twin lessons on this theme arise from the 2-year-long battle conducted by BA cabin crews, members of the UNITE union.

These workers originally had no option but to strike against multiple attacks on their jobs, pay and conditions – including reduction of staffing levels for in-flight crews, and the introduction

*(continued on next page)*

(continued from previous page) of new cabin crews on far worse wages and conditions, all imposed without even seeking talks with the union.

The UNITE members were driven to strike to defend union recognition, in order to defend their conditions against blatant attempts to wipe out both.

The tenacity of the cabin crew UNITE members has been remarkable, but a combination of anti-union laws and failure by the national union leadership to rapidly spread the action to the wider BA workforce left them in a dangerous stalemate, ruthlessly exploited by management, who launched a vicious press propaganda war, and meantime victimised strikers.

They disciplined and sacked UNITE union reps, ripped up union facilities previously agreed, and withdrew travel concessions from staff who had taken part in perfectly legal

strikes. The battle went from defence of staffing levels and pay to one for the very survival of the union as a workers' defence organisation.

Now, faced with further strike ballots, BA bosses have conceded on most of their witch-hunt against the union, its reps and its members, restoring travel concessions to the strikers; restoring wages docked from crew off sick during the strikes; conceding union facilities again; and agreeing binding arbitration through ACAS on all the union reps who were victimised. A victory for the tenacious action of union members on those issues – but no concession whatsoever has been won on staffing levels and the galloping introduction of lower-paid new starts.

The twin lessons for other workers from this protracted struggle is that action forces concessions out of even the most hard-faced exploiters,

but action in isolation from wider workforces severely weakens the chances of outright victory.

## All out 30 June

Over 250,000 civil servants striking on 30 June, alongside tens of thousands of teachers and lecturers, would be a powerful body-blow to those in government hell-bent on making ordinary people pay for the bankers' and billionaires' wrecking ball to the economy.

But what an infinitely more potent weapon it would be if they were joined by EIS members facing the worst assault on their conditions in generations from COSLA; plus Scottish NHS staff who face 3.3 per cent cuts to health care this year and a future with redundancies, as Heath Boards seek to cut their deficits, according to new research by the British Medical Journal; and council workers who are already facing the brunt of pay cuts, work overloads and savage job losses?

## Action and arguments

Every opponent of cuts, all who yearn a decent, civilised society that raises hopes for the future and protects the most vulnerable, should work flat out to make 30 June the biggest and widest possible day of strikes and rallies.

Direct action protests against the perpetrators of cuts, combined with arguments for taxing the rich and taking wealth into public, democratic ownership, will help to raise the sights of people who otherwise despair at what the future holds.

The SSP will not flinch in helping build such actions and popularising socialist alternatives to the cuts. We will stand up for Scotland – and demand the newly elected SNP government do the same, rather than asking for the power to cut taxes to the obscenely rich whilst sharpening the knives for the jobs, wages and public services that ordinary Scots depend upon.

### *Richie Venton spoke to Willie Telfer, PCS Dept for Transport Group Assistant Secretary*

"There are 18 Coastguard stations in the UK. The government planned to centralise them into two super-stations.

"There was huge uproar, for instance in Stornaway and Shetland, with mass community campaigns.

"Coastguards tend to be ex-fishermen or seafarers, and live locally. There are also retained coastguards, with jobs ranging from the local church minister to civil servants.

"The service is a matter of life and death, and local communities know that. They know how absurd the government plan is, to leave only two stations, near Aberdeen and Southampton, over 600 miles apart!

"So the fury was deep-rooted, with, for example, 250 at public meetings in Stornaway.

"It was a mostly community-led campaign, with the scattered PCS membership (coastguards) joining in – with the

open threat of strike ballots by PCS across the entire department for transport if there are any compulsory redundancies; driving examiners standing up for coastguards.

"Faced with this uproar, the government has made it clear they are not going to stick to their original, crazy plan of only two stations, though it's still unclear how many will be saved. This goes to show what pressure can achieve.

"In another section of the Dept for Transport – the DSA – we have won an outright victory, this time led by trade union action.

"The Cardiff DSA office does the admin for driving tests in England and Wales, and includes the Welsh language unit. DSA management wanted to close it down, to get their hands on the building, and made it plain there was no way they would back down.

"PCS balloted and won a massive vote for strike action. The Cardiff PCS DSA branch led the big anti-cuts march to the Welsh Assembly; were prominent

on the TUC's 26 March demo, and won the backing of politicians from several parties.

"This high profile campaign, and the mere threat of strike action, has forced the intransigent DSA management into a total capitulation, saving our DSA in Cardiff, but also winning five other union demands, including a moratorium on plans to shed 40 per cent of the Driving Test centres.

"Fighting the cuts, you often run into those who say 'it can't be done'. These two examples prove the government and employers can be stopped – even before generalised, widespread action.

"This government is a coalition, divided and weak. So 30 June is not just a show of strength, but another step on the road to halting the cuts. And within PCS, we are not just building for national action, but also encouraging action locally and within groups/departments. Whilst defending ourselves from the government sledgehammer we are not going to allow ourselves to be tickled to death!"

# BUSINESS AS USUAL AT THE IMF

by Raphie de Santos

Wanted New Head for IMF:  
Must be able to oversee holding  
of countries to ransom while  
slashing public spending and  
selling off their assets.

**THE** resignation of the Strauss Kahn as managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) because of his arrest for an alleged sexual assault on a hotel chambermaid raises issues around the murky secretive world of the IMF and the macho culture of society that he came from.

Kahn was from France where every establishment male politician is expected to have a powerful libido. His previous aggressive behaviour to women was thus tolerated and not challenged. Of course such an attitude has much deeper consequences for women in French society.

Only 10 per cent of rapes are reported in France compared to 55 per cent in the USA and only one in ten of them result in a conviction. Women in France are paid 27 per cent less than men and hold fewer elected positions than in other large European countries. Segolene Royal was accused of neglecting her children when she ran for the presidency in 2007.

But what is the IMF anyway?

It is a club of loan sharks established in 1944 in Bretton Woods (USA) by fort-five countries to stabilise the international finance system. Now over 200 countries are members and they each pledge a nominal amount of money in proportion to the size of their economies.

If a country runs into financial trouble they can borrow up to a certain multiple of their pledged money and the



other countries have to turn part of their pledges into real money for the loan. Countries votes within the IMF are based on these nominal pledges – the USA has 17 per cent of the votes and Europe 30 per cent.

The loans agreed to countries are made in return for the countries agreeing certain conditions – called structured adjustment programmes (SAP).

IMF inspectors monitor and make regular visits to inspect the borrowing country's finances to ensure SAP conditions are being met.

These SAPs will typically include cuts to public services, wage cuts and privatisation of national assets and services and opening up of the economy to international corporations and finance.

Prior to the financial crash most of the IMF's time of the last three decades has been taken up with the debt crisis of developing countries - itself caused by the lending practices and terms imposed by Western countries and banks.

This saw loans forced on the poor south at exorbitant interest rates and the solution of the IMF was to lend multiplies of these loans on these countries just to service the interest rate payments while imposing SAPs with severe conditions.

Of course since August 2007

the IMF's attention has switched to the developed world as the bailing out of the world financial system, the global economy and the cost of the deepest recession since the 1930s has fallen onto governments.

This has meant huge rafts of public debt have been racked up right across the developed economies. The weakest countries' – Greece, Ireland and Portugal -economies public finances have deteriorated to the point where they are effectively bankrupt.

In stepped the IMF together with European Union with fresh loans to pay off the original loans. That was to stop huge losses being carried by the international banks that held the original loans and avert another financial crisis and recession.

The current battle ground for this fire fighting is Europe with Spain the next likely candidate and Belgium and Britain not far behind.

Britain has never accumulated these levels of public debt during peacetime and attempted to pay them off after a deep recession while the economy is stagnating. Britain was bailed out in 1976 by the IMF after a severe recession and increasing inflation meant that it had difficulty servicing its public debt.

So will Kahn's resignation open up the door for a managing director of the IMF from the developing world? Not likely as the IMF director has always been from Europe and the IMF's sister operation has always had a North American one.

These positions are nominated form member countries but are in effect always ratified by the USA. Previously they have rejected nominations that do not meet their requirements. The IMF number two is always from the USS to. The USA calls the shots and wants to ensure the world financial system which it dominates is stabilised.

Since the crisis that the IMF is trying to stabilise is in Europe it will be a European who is chosen to be the next head. Kahn was ideal for the USA because he was able to get the periphery countries to buy into the IMF's austerity terms and keep Germany on side for providing bail out loans through the EU.

That is why they are likely to go for another French candidate. German Chancellor Merkel is under pressure from the German electorate to be tougher on the bailout conditions and if necessary let countries default and essentially go bankrupt. But Washington fears this would be the start of domino of defaults across Europe leading to a new baking crisis and world recession.

The US and the IMF may be more careful who they choose as individual but it will be business as usual who ever take over at the IMF; making the poor pay more for the mistakes of global finance to and propping up an unfair economic system.

■ *The views are the authors own.*

# THE ARAB WORLD IN REVOLT

As turmoil continues across the Arab world **Bill Bonnar** takes a look at what has been achieved so far and where event may go next.

**WHEN** we look at revolutions throughout history we tend to focus on a particular event and call that the revolution. The storming of the Bastille in 1789 or the storming of the Winter Palace in 1917; revolutions always seem to involve storming something.

In reality a revolution is always a process, sometimes quite protracted, involving a whole series of inter-connected events before it can be agreed that the revolution has ended and a new society has emerged. Revolutions are always best viewed from a position of hindsight; when in the middle of a revolutionary process it can often be quite difficult to see the wood for the trees.

That would appear to be where we are with the Arab revolution.

It had a definite beginning. In December, in Tunisia, a lone protest against corruption and police lawlessness sparked a nationwide revolt which within weeks had spread throughout the Arab world

It has also had some remarkable achievements including the overthrow of two hitherto impregnable looking dictatorships in the aforementioned

Tunisia and Egypt.

The movement has been characterised by mass protests calling for political, social and economic change but as the different national characteristics of each country kicked in these movements have become divergent.

The struggle in Egypt and Tunisia after the overthrow of their respective dictatorships has assumed a very different character from that in Yemen where this process is still ongoing.

The conflicts in Libya and Syria have taken another direction due in part to the nature of these regimes and of their opponents.

The struggle in the Gulf has taken on yet another form while in Palestine it is shaping a whole new era in the struggle against Israel. And lastly in Algeria and Sudan the movement appears to be very marginal at this time.

Let us first deal with Libya. The Left's critique of the Gaddafi regime is well rehearsed and doesn't need repeated here.

However, there are aspects of this conflict which create real dilemmas for the Left.

First, we must challenge the idea that what is happening in Libya is part of a broad based nationwide revolt



against the regime. On the contrary the regime retains significant levels of popular support.

Some of this is ideological given the way it wraps itself in the flag of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism, some of it is based on tribalism and clan loyalty and some of it based on self interest in a country where the state is by far and away the largest employer.

What's more support for the regime might actually be growing given the attacks on the country. As for the rebels, the claim that they speak for the Libyan people is patently untrue. They are essentially an alliance of specific groups with their own political, tribal and religious agendas.

Then there is the Nato led intervention. Under the cover of a vaguely worded UN resolution they have attacked the country with the clear aim of overthrowing the regime, replacing it with a dependent, pro-western government and gaining strategic control over

Libya's oil reserves.

This has always been the West's agenda; the conflict has simply given them the opportunity to put this agenda into practice.

Some on the Left argue that we should support the rebellion but oppose the western intervention but this makes no real sense given that the Western intervention and the anti-regime rebellion have become one and the same. In fact, it would be now correct to describe this as a Nato led rebellion given that Nato is largely financing, organising and supporting the military action of the rebels.

The recent African Union initiative called for an end to Nato intervention, a negotiated ceasefire between the regime and its opponents and political reforms leading to UN supervised elections.

Interestingly, this was endorsed by the regime but rejected by the rebels and Nato.

Yet this represents the only reasonable way out

of this conflict. Any other scenario would be a disaster for the country and the Libyan people.

In Egypt, a broad based movement for change achieved a staggering success when it forced the removal of Mubarak.

However the Mubarak regime is still in power only without the former dictator at its head. The regime has made many concessions including plans to hold democratic elections in September and has promised wider reforms. However, it wants to control this process to ensure an outcome which suits itself, the rich elite who have been its main benefactors and its international allies; most notably the United States.

It also effectively retains a veto over the whole process if things start to go wrong. All of this has split the formerly united movement between those who have adopted a wait and see attitude at least until the elections in September and those who want to maintain the pressure on

the regime. Something similar is happening in Tunisia.

In the Gulf, protest has been met with fierce repression openly supported by the West. Here there is little pretext about supporting demonstrators. Its alliance with the regions medieval rulers ensures that these regimes can do what they want and will be actively supported by the West.

No bombings of Riyadh or assassination attempts on the royal family there.

One of the most encouraging sign has been in Palestine where protests by mostly young people and the fear of much more to come have galvanised the two mainstream movements; Fatah and Hamas into ending their impasse and rebuilding a united movement for Palestinian self-determination.

What is likely to happen in the near future?

In Libya the stalemate is likely to continue for the immediate future with the regime retaining control of its power base in and around Tripoli, where the vast majority of Libyans actually live. Their strategy is one of simple survival. Each day it resists the Nato onslaught and stays in power will be regarded as a victory.

The rebels do not have the strength or support to take power without Nato help. As this would almost certainly require ground forces entering Libya; the risks would be enormous. It is unlikely to be too long before voices are heard which calls for a deal to be made.

This is also the likely outcome in Syria. The movements for change in the Gulf, while still active, appear to have been severely damaged while in Yemen the regime clings to power with its fingernails.

There it seems only a matter of time before the dictatorship collapses.

In Egypt little will be resolved before the elections in September. The conduct of these elections and the eventual result will shape what happens next. If a genuine democratic and representative government emerges while most of the state power still resides with the regime a new power struggle will emerge which will ultimately be decided in the streets.

The same may well be true for Tunisia. In the Gulf, sheer military force allied to unflinching support from the West is likely to keep these regimes in power for the foreseeable but the region remains a centre of instability.

In Palestine, the Arab Spring has given renewed confidence to a movement which will simply no longer tolerate the corruption and treason of Fatah yet is

deeply suspicious of Hamas.

So in the longer terms what will change? What will be the legacy of the revolution? There are likely to be three.

The first is that a particular form of Arab government will be consigned to the history books. Many Arab states have been ruled by autocracies (from both the Left and Right). Such autocracies have been overthrown in Egypt and Tunisia and likely in the near future in Yemen.

However, even if some survive in the near future in places like Libya and Syria; their days are clearly numbered. Instead there will be the emergence of more democratic and representative governments created either by revolution or the fear of revolution. This fact alone will lay the foundation of more changes down the line.

The second is that the West's hold in the Arab

world will be seriously weakened. They may call for more democracy but their support for the dictatorships was actually based on reasoned calculation. They could control the dictatorships, or most of them, but controlling newly emerging democratic governments will prove much more difficult.

Thirdly, we are and will see the re-emergence of a coherent Left championing the social and economic demands of the revolution and linking into the new social movements which have emerged.

At some stage in the not too distant future political pundits will declare that the Arab Spring is over and to a certain extent it will be true. However, what will emerge will be radically different from what went before and lay the foundation for the next stage of struggles.

## BASQUE INDEPENDENCE LEFT MAKE BIG GAINS

by Ken Ferguson

**BILDU** (Unite) the most recent incarnation of the Basque pro-independence left has achieved a great and unprecedented success in the elections in the Basque Country.

The gains came as, across Spain, the ruling Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) took a drubbing in local elections and thousands occupied public squares in demands for an end to unemployment and corruption.

Bildu is the latest party expressing the views of the pro independence left set up following the banning of a number of

similar formations supposedly for supporting the armed struggle by ETA.

Indeed the party's gains are the more remarkable considering that it only recently beat off attempts to ban it in the Spanish constitutional court.

And the level of anti democratic repression they faced is further underlined by the fact that more than 60,000 Basques have been prevented from standing as candidates, in a clear violation by the Spanish state of their civil and political rights.

The scale of the gains are sweeping and include:

■ Bildu gained 314,996 votes - 22.28 per cent per cent of all

votes cast.

■ In the town councils, it has 1138 councillors. It has the greatest number of councillors in the Basque Country.

■ It has gained most votes in the town councils, winning control of 113 town councils in the Basque Country, followed by the PNV (Basque party of the Right) which won control of 98.

■ It is the second party in the Basque country, exceeded only by the PNV, with only 18,000 votes between Bildu and the long established PNV.

■ Bildu was the clear winners in the province of Gipuzkoa and in the city council of San Sebastián/Donostia.

The result was hailed by the

pro independence left LAB union federation who commented:

"We consider that the success of "Bildu" constitutes an advance in the struggles which the Basque working class is carrying forward in these times of capitalist crisis, a step forward in the struggle for Socialism and the Independence of the Basque Country."

For those in Scotland who support independence from a left standpoint like the SSP the Bildu result underlines the urgent need to build the independence movement and make the left's voice a strong one within it.

## NEW THINKING NEEDED ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

by Mhairi McAlpine

**EARLIER** this month, Ken Clarke caused outrage by remarks made in a media interview. When questioned about the tariffs received for rape convictions, he asserted “A serious rape, with violence and an unwilling woman, the tariff is much longer...”

“Date rape can be as serious as the worst rapes, but date rapes... vary extraordinarily one from another and in the end the judge has to decide on the circumstances.”

Implying that date rape isn't serious, doesn't involve violence or an “unwilling woman” is shocking coming from the Justice Secretary.

Based on combined data from the British Crime Survey and government surveys, only 15 out of every 1000 rapes end in conviction with the vast majority never even reaching a police station.

However this conviction rate is likely to be an overestimate.

The BCS obtains data on rape statistics on self-reports within a general survey using untrained interviewers and only from permanent domestic households.

Studies have shown that survivors are often unwilling to name their experiences as rape; when detailed



interviewing is done, prevalence rates of sexual assaults shoot up and that those in temporary accommodation are both more likely to be and have been victims of sexual assault.

The astoundingly low reporting, prosecution and conviction rate coupled with the estimated lifetime prevalence rate of approximately 25 per cent suggests that the justice system as it now stands is incapable of dealing with this epidemic.

The common reactionary demands of hard sentencing and increased surveillance for convicted rapists are unlikely to improve this, for you have to be a very unlucky rapist indeed to be amongst the tiny fraction who are actually convicted.

The media plays an important role in maintaining hegemony around the

definition of “real rapes”. Most news coverage of rape features extreme violence, multiple assailants and in public places. At the same time a great many column inches are given over to women who are convicted of perverting the course of justice, once an investigation has collapsed.

The message is clear a victim is bruised and bloodied, innocent in behaviour and demeanour. The rest are lying bitches.

Although handling of rape allegations has improved enormously over the past few decades, women are still treated less as victims than as a crime scene and a witness.

Maximising forensic evidence collection takes priority over psychological needs while the adversarial nature of proceedings re-traumatises victims. When asked what motivated them to

report the offence, most victims cite a desire to prevent the perpetrator re-offending. In a system where 94 per cent of reported offenders walk free, it is unlikely that the recidivism rate is significantly affected.

Given the recent high profile goings of false accusers and, unbelievably, a raped woman who withdrew her allegation, it brings into question if it is more likely that someone who goes to the police

to complain of rape will be convicted of an offence than someone who commits rape.

Debates around sexual violence must progress. It is no longer enough for women to rely on the justice system in its current form for protection against rape, as has shown itself clearly inadequate to fulfil this function.

Over seven million women currently living in the UK will be a victim of rape in their lifetime - and there is no victim without a perpetrator. In a country where the majority of people believe that a woman can be held responsible for her assault through her prior behaviour, and most young men state that would force a woman to have sex if they thought they could get away with it - a new method of addressing sexual violence must be found.



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